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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000463

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE, EUR/PGI JODY  
BUCKNEBERG, AND DRL

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SUBJECT: ROMA AND JEWISH LEADERS RESPOND TO FAR RIGHT GAINS

REF: BUDAPEST 410

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Counselor:Jon Martinson,  
reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In the wake of the far right Jobbik party's success in the June 7 European Parliament elections, the Charge and EmbOffs met with Jewish and Roma leaders to assess their communities' reactions. Contrary to expectations, the leaders expressed only moderate concern and revealed no clear strategy to address the radical party's increasing popularity. Tensions between and within both groups further complicates the likelihood of a united response to extremism.

End Summary.

¶2. (U) The far-right party Jobbik exceeded expectations when it netted a disturbing 14.77 percent of the votes cast in the June 7 EP elections (reftel). Running on a predominantly anti-Roma and (more subtly) anti-Semitic platform, the Embassy expected Jobbik's success to stir widespread concern within those two communities. To assess the reaction, the Embassy convened four separate meetings with Jewish and Roma leaders in the week following the elections. The leaders included Peter Feldmajer (President of the Confederation of Jewish Communities), Rabbi Shlomo Koves (Chief Rabbi of the Hungarian Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish Group), Istvan Makai (Chairman of the Budapest Roma Self-Government), and Istvan Aba-Horvath (Chairman of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Hajdu-Bihar County).

¶3. (C) While each of the leaders expressed "concern" and "shock" over the election results, they indicated surprisingly little reaction within their communities. Other than Istvan Makai's concern that Roma "might" flee to the U.S. en masse, the leaders' responses suggested their communities are in a "wait and see" mode. Also surprising, neither of the groups reported having any kind of contingency plan to deal with a further rise in radicalism. This despite months of increasingly hostile anti-Roma and anti-Semitic rhetoric from the far right.

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SHOULDN'T WE BE WORKING TOGETHER?

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¶4. (C) Despite sharing the focus of the far right's wrath, the Roma and Jewish communities don't see each other as mutual partners. In fact, none of the leaders could point to any examples where the two groups have worked together to combat extremism -- and none hinted at any desire to do so. Peter Feldmajer attributed this to a lack of real counterparts in the Roma community and an anti-Roma sentiment within the Jewish community. Istvan Makai offered no explanation, only saying that efforts to work with the Jewish community have been largely unsuccessful.

¶5. (C) Any hope to unite the Roma and Jewish groups is

further confounded by regular, and at times petty, infighting within each community. The Jewish community is fractured, with most of the Jews being secular, and the remaining practicing Jews being divided across several diverse sub-groups. Even these groups spar as they jockey for power and legitimacy in an effort to secure more funding and greater influence. Following his meeting with the Embassy, Feldmajer asked not to be featured with Sholmo in an article on the Embassy's website. He said, "this would be akin to putting a bishop and the leader of the witches' association together."

¶6. (C) The Roma community's response to extremism is likewise hindered by internal divisions. In their case, the divisions lie primarily across ethnic and ideological lines. In addition to the three historical Roma ethnic groups in Hungary (Romungo, Beas, and Olah), deep political divisions fracture their community. Istvan Makai noted that, not surprisingly, these political divisions mirror those of the larger society. (Comment: Even if the various Roma factions wanted to respond to the situation as one, there is a leadership vacuum at the top. The head of the National Gypsy Authority, Orban Kolompar, was recently indicted on fraud charges. Two other prominent Roma leaders, Member of European Parliament Viktoria Mohacsi and Parliamentary Commissioner of National and Ethnic Minority Rights Erno Kallai, have each shared with the Embassy their plans to flee Hungary if the situation worsens. End comment.)

¶7. (C) The Roma community's unity is also complicated by the lack of leaders arising from within the community. Instead, the leading political parties have selected Roma to be their

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representatives. While often impressive individuals, they are not necessarily widely supported within the community.

¶8. (C) Comment: Although there is a feeling of concern (not panic) expressed by leaders of both communities, there is no clear response in the works from either side. What is clear, though, is that it's unlikely the two groups will work together to address the situation. Likewise, a unified position from within each group may also be difficult given the deep divisions that exist. End comment.

Levine